(e) If so, what is the response in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) The French Law bans all ostentatious religious symbols in French Public Schools without prejudice to any particular religion.

(c) and (d) Prime Minister has received representations regarding this issue. The Prime Minister and the Minister of External Affairs have taken it up with the French government suitably.

(e) The French Government have agreed to explore a pragmatic solution to the issue within their legal framework.

Proposal from Pakistan to solve Kashmir Problem

108. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received any proposal from the Government of Pakistan for the solution of Kashmir problem;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what action Government have taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No, sir. Pakistan has only made procedural suggestions for discussing the issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) and (c) It has been pointed out to the Government of Pakistan that discussions on Jammu and Kashmir are already agreed at the level of Foreign Secretaries, in the framework of the Composite Dialogue.

Prime Minister's Foreign Visit

†109. SMT. SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister had recently visited USA, Britain etc.;

(b) the matters discussed during the visit;

† Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

(c) whether in his speech prime Minister had staked claim for permanent membership in UN Security Council; and

(d) if so, the reaction of various countries thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Prime Minister visited USA and UK in September 2004 and The Netherlands in November 2004.

USA

Prime Minister addressed the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2004. In his address to the UNGA, and in his bilateral interactions, on the sidelines of the UNGA, a number of important issues on the international agenda were covered.

Prime Minister met with President Bush on 21 September, 2004 in New York. They held wide-ranging discussions including developments of bilateral relations, terrorism, and global trade. The two leaders exchanged thoughts on their shared global concerns and agreed that making the world a safer place was an overriding priority. They agreed that stronger partnership between India and the United States, two nations sharing values and traditions, acting in concert in international institutions, would enhance global security and prosperity.

UK

Prime Minister led a delegation including External Affairs Minister to the UK on 19-20 September, 2004. Prime Minister had wide ranging discussions on bilateral, regional and international issues with British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Prime Minister interacted with a high level British Corporate delegation and met a delegation from Labour Party Friends of India group in British parliament.

The Netherlands

Prime Minister headed the Indian delegation, which comprised External Affairs Minister and Commerce and Industry Minister to the 5th India-EU Summit at the Hague from 7-9 November, 2004. The EU side was headed by Dutch Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende, in his capacity as President-in-Office of the European Council, and included Mr. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. We agreed

to strengthen and deepen our bilateral relations including Parliamentary exchanges, enhance Civil Society interaction and deepen cooperation in energy, Environment and Science and Technology. We agreed to intensify consultations on UN Reforms and Cooperation in Counter Terrorism. Prime Minsiter called on Queen Beatrix and participated in the 'India-EU Business Round Table'—a select group of Indian and European CEOs. External Affairs Minister had a bilateral meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot.

(c) Prime Minister in his address to the UNGA, while emphasizing the need for UN reform said that the expansion of the Security Council, in the category of both permanent and non-permanent members, and the inclusion of countries like India as permanent members, would be a first step in the process of making the United Nations a truly representative body.

(d) A large number of leaders in their speeches at the 59th UNGA referred to the necessity of UN institutional reforms, the expansion of the Security Council, the inclusion of new permanent members and India's credentials in this regard.

Ban on Indian Scientists

†110. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the United States is trying to impose ban against three more Indian scientists for extending help to Iranian nuclear programme without any solid evidence against them;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's reaction thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) On September 29, 2004, the US Government imposed sanctions against two retired Indian Nuclear Scientists of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), citing alleged assistance to the Iranian nuclear programme including

† Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.